

# WYOMING 2013 STATEWIDE HUNTING SEASON FORECAST



## PRONGHORN (antelope)

### JACKSON REGION

In Jackson Region, northern portions of the Sublette pronghorn herd include Hunt Areas 85 and 86. Although hunter success is good, Hunt Area 85 (Gros Ventre) offers very limited hunting opportunities. There will only be 15 licenses offered for the season. Hunt Area 86 (Hoback) has seen an increase in pronghorn during the past several years. However, hunter access is limited and the majority of the hunting opportunities are located on private lands in the Boundurant area.

### CODY REGION

The Carter Mountain pronghorn herd (Hunt Areas 78, 81, and 82) is near its population objective. There is continued need however, for doe/fawn licenses due to too many pronghorn in crop fields. As a result, most of the doe/fawn licenses (Type 6, 7, or 8) have limitations on where pronghorn can be harvested (on or within ½ mile of irrigated lands). Please read the limitations for your license carefully. If hunters are not familiar with areas that their license is restricted to, contact local Game & Fish personnel. Hunters who have purchased doe/fawn licenses are asked to contact a local game warden for names and contact information of landowners looking for hunters to harvest pronghorn near farm ground. Many of those names are also available on the Game and Fish website under “Hunter Assistance Program” tab.

After being above population objectives for several years, pronghorn populations in northern portions of the Bighorn Basin (Hunt Area 80) have been reduced and permit levels for the 2013 season have also been reduced. Damage issues on many private lands have been resolved and there is less need for doe/fawn harvest.

Hunting for buck pronghorn in northern portions of the Bighorn Basin should be similar to last year. Dry conditions for the second year will result in bucks congregated near water (e.g., stock ponds, irrigation ditches, natural springs, and creeks). With little vegetative growth, horn growth will not be spectacular this year. As in most years, the potential for “trophy” bucks in the northern interior of the Bighorn Basin will be low.

Most pronghorn populations in the southern Bighorn Basin (Hunt Areas 76, 77, 83, 110, 114, and 115) are slightly below objective. However, because of potential damage issues on private lands, we are again offering doe/fawn licenses throughout many of the hunt areas. As noted before, hunters need to be aware that most doe/fawn licenses and Type 2 licenses are only valid “on or within ½ mile of irrigated land.” Overall, pronghorn hunting in the southern Bighorn Basin for 2013 should be good. Preliminary results from pronghorn classification surveys conducted in August revealed some good quality bucks still exist, along with some record-setting fawn crops. If winter fawn survival is good, expect some additional hunting opportunity in 2014.

### SHERIDAN REGION

The outlook for pronghorn hunting in most of Sheridan Region is good. Northeast Wyoming has abundant herds of pronghorn. Populations are still at high levels in several herd units, so hunting seasons have been designed to give hunters plenty of opportunity in those areas. However, in

hunt areas north of Gillette and Moorcroft, pronghorn populations are lower than a few years ago, so license numbers are lower than in the past. In Sheridan Region pronghorn hunt areas, hunters are allowed to purchase a 2<sup>nd</sup> any antelope license and up to 4 doe/fawn licenses. However, potential hunters need to be aware that most pronghorn hunting is found on private land and they should make arrangements for a place to hunt prior to buying licenses. Hunters willing to wait until after opening day or the first weekend of the season may find it easier to get on private lands. It is possible to find some pronghorn on parcels of public lands scattered around northeast Wyoming, but hunters can expect to bump into other hunters also using those lands. Because of crop damage, Hunt Areas 22 and 102 near Buffalo will have rifle doe/fawn seasons beginning September 1 in portions of these areas.

### **GREEN RIVER REGION**

Pronghorn hunting opportunity will vary throughout Green River Region depending on animal numbers. Many pronghorn populations in Green River Region were significantly affected by the winter of 2010-11 and lower fawn production/survival during the summer of 2012. Hunters will note a lack of yearling bucks this year due to very poor fawn survival last summer. On a brighter note, fawn numbers are much higher and more moisture this year, coupled with a relatively mild winter, resulted in better horn growth on adult bucks. In general, license numbers and season lengths are similar to 2012 across the Region (Hunt Areas 53, 57, 58, 59, 92, 93, 94, 96, 98, 99, 100, and 112). Hunters in Hunt Area 94 are reminded to obtain a permission slip from Western Wyoming Range Limited Partnership before accessing private lands.

### **LARAMIE REGION**

With good spring moisture and recent summer rains, pronghorn should be entering the fall in very good body condition and hunters should expect to see lots of bucks. Many of the Region's pronghorn herd units are at or above their population objectives despite last year's drought conditions. As a result, hunting should be excellent where hunters can gain access to private lands. In the Medicine Bow and Elk Mountain areas, pronghorn numbers have been reduced to address poor habitat conditions, but hunters can still expect a good hunt.

Much of the land in southeastern Wyoming is privately-owned, which limits access in some areas. Consequently, hunters should be cautious when purchasing leftover licenses in those areas identified as having limited access. Healthy populations and good buck ratios will provide ample opportunity in areas where hunters can find a place to hunt. Hunters should refer to Bureau of Land Management (BLM) maps to determine which areas contain public land. Access for pronghorn hunting on private land in the region continues to improve, but can still be problematic. Private Lands Public Wildlife (PLPW) Hunter Management Areas and numerous Walk-In Areas provide access for pronghorn hunters on both private and public lands throughout the Region.

### **LANDER REGION**

Pronghorn populations continue to be down significantly throughout Lander Region. Of the Region's 7 pronghorn herds where we're able to estimate population size, 1 was above and 6 were below objective following 2012 hunting season. To date, pronghorn classifications are revealing fawn productivity, yearling buck ratios, and overall numbers of pronghorn are down this summer because of extreme drought conditions experienced in 2012. Total adult buck-to-doe ratios, given mild winter and good spring conditions, are better than expected. In addition,

many mature bucks have attained quality size and hunters should expect good harvest success with a little more effort.

### **CASPER REGION**

Pronghorn hunting throughout Casper Region will be good in most areas in 2013, but may not be the quality experienced for much of the past decade. Due to elevated winter losses during the winter of 2010-11 and 2 consecutive years of record low fawn production, hunters will not see the high densities of pronghorn that were common a few years ago. However, appropriate license reductions were made for the 3<sup>rd</sup> consecutive year in an effort to sustain hunter success rates and hunting opportunities. In general, hunters should expect to see fewer pronghorn throughout Casper Region. Pronghorn numbers remain notably low in Hunt Areas 30 and 31 south of Douglas and Glenrock, in portions of Thunder Basin, and in much of the Cheyenne River drainage between Lusk and Newcastle. Hunters in southern Niobrara County should continue to expect good success along Highway 18-20, although local managers report pronghorn densities will not be as high as they have been in recent years. In this area, good hunter access to private lands via the Department's PLPW access program continue to provide outstanding opportunity. The western portion of Casper region is more of a mixed bag. Pronghorn numbers south of Casper remain near average levels, while in areas west and northeast of the city; hunters will see far fewer pronghorn than they have been accustomed to in recent years. Again, elevated winter losses coupled with poor fawn production/survival have resulted in significant population reductions near the Casper area.

While overall buck availability will be down compared to recent levels in most areas, buck quality should be a little better than normal. Mild weather during the winter of 2012-13 enabled pronghorn to devote much of their energy to horn growth as the energetic demands on winter survival were not as high as normal. Given the majority of horn growth occurs during winter and early spring months for pronghorn, bucks were able to get a good head start with the mild weather, and received an additional boost with good precipitation throughout spring.

### **PINEDALE REGION**

In the Pinedale Region, northern portions of the Sublette pronghorn herd include Hunt Areas 87 through 90. Population estimates for this herd are slightly below desired levels. Lower elevation sagebrush communities throughout the Region are in very poor condition due to consecutive years of drought. By mid-August, sagebrush plants were showing signs of water stress. Additionally, flowing plants and grass production is very poor across all lower elevation pronghorn habitats. Lack of water sources and poor forage quality have forced pronghorn to search harder for food and water, resulting in a more scattered distribution of animals across more typically used habitats. Based on below-average snow accumulation last winter and observations from this summer's surveys, adult mortality during the winter of 2012-13 was "below normal" on most winter range complexes. Despite dry conditions this year, mature buck ratios are good and hunters should expect high success.

## **DEER**

### **JACKSON REGION**

The Wyoming Range deer population is designated as a special management herd which provides high quality hunting opportunities, mature age-class deer, and high buck-to-doe ratios.

Deer numbers increased over the last 2 years because of high over-winter survival. The 2+ year old bucks should be well-represented during fall hunting seasons this year. Early spring green up on winter and spring transition ranges allowed bucks an early start to antler production. Summer rains were timely and maintained forbs in a high nutritional state. As a result, hunters may notice bucks with exceptional antler growth - similar to 2012.

The southern portion of the herd unit will offer 11 days of antlered deer hunting in Hunt Areas 134 and 135. Youth license holders will be able to take any deer from October 1-14, while general license deer hunters will be able to take antlered deer from October 1-11. General license, antlered-only deer hunting will run from September 15 through October 6 in the Greys River (Hunt Area 144), Salt River (Hunt Area 145) and along the east slope of the Wyoming Range (Hunt Area 143).

Nonresident quotas for 2013 in Region G will remain at 600 licenses. This strategy should help maintain quality bucks given existing herd ratios and population size.

In addition to mule deer hunting opportunities, a limited quota, antlerless white-tailed deer season will be offered for the 1<sup>st</sup> time in the Salt River drainage (Hunt Area 145). White-tailed deer numbers along the Salt River have increased and can support a limited doe/fawn hunt. Subsequently, a limited quota, type 8 license, (35 licenses) will be offered in Hunt Area 145 from November 1 through January 31. This type 8 license can be purchased in addition to a statewide general deer license.

The Targhee deer herd is a small population on the west side of the Teton Mountains managed to provide recreational hunting opportunities. Population growth is restricted by limited winter range. Proposed hunting seasons in 2013 include a general license season for antlered deer from September 15 through October 6.

## **CODY REGION**

Following the 2012 hunting season, Game and Fish personnel surveyed slightly fewer deer on the west side of the Bighorn Mountains. While total deer were down slightly, buck/doe ratios remained similar to past years. That should translate to hunting conditions in 2013 similar to last year. Weather immediately before and during the hunt plays an important role in distribution of bucks. If it's been warm and dry, search at higher elevations on the Bighorns. If there's been some snow by the October 15 opening date, deer have probably begun their migration, so hunt near the forest boundary. Deer and elk hunting open October 15 and crowding can be an issue for many hunters. If you don't want to deal with hunters during this busy time, go to the least accessible canyons, hunt the thickest timber, or walk greater than 1 mile from busy roads.

Although we believe deer numbers are reduced, there is still reason to harvest antlerless deer on the west side of the Bighorn Basin. Most doe/fawn licenses (type 6, 7, or 8) have limitations on where animals can be harvested (i.e., on or within ½ mile of irrigated lands). Please read the regulations carefully. If hunters are not familiar with areas where their license is valid, contact local Game & Fish personnel for assistance. Hunters possessing doe/fawn licenses should contact a local game warden for names and locations of landowners looking for hunters. Many landowner names are also available on the Game and Fish website under the "Hunter Assistance Program" tab.

For the past 3 years, mule deer numbers have declined in southern portions of the Bighorn Basin. Thus, deer may be a little more difficult to find this year. While some limited quota areas (Hunt Areas 37 and 119) should see fair to good hunting, others (Hunt Areas 116, 118, 120, and 125) will supply only fair hunting opportunity. In most, if not all general license areas, hunting conditions will be much more difficult. A number of hunt areas will offer limited doe/fawn hunting opportunity to reduce damage issues on private lands. White-tailed deer numbers are good across the southern Bighorn Basin and license quotas were increased in some Hunt Areas to provide additional hunting opportunity.

Mule deer hunting should be good on both the North and South Forks of the Shoshone River. No significant mortality was documented during the winter of 2012-13, so plenty of bucks should be available to hunters if weather conditions trigger migrations prior to the end of the hunting season. Low fawn production resulted in reduced deer numbers, and as a result, antlerless deer hunting opportunities will be reduced in 2013.

Opportunities to harvest mature bucks in Hunt Areas 105 and 106 should be good in later portions of the general license hunting season and November limited quota seasons this fall. Hunters may also notice an increase in the percent of older-aged bucks in Hunt Area 109 due to recent changes in hunting season structure. Opportunities to harvest doe deer between Cody and Powell have been expanded in Hunt Area 121 because of increases in crop damage.

### **SHERIDAN REGION**

Deer hunting in Sheridan Region will be similar recent years. However, deer hunters in areas near Gillette and Moorcroft can expect to see less deer than they did a few years ago. Sportsmen with access to private lands should have high harvest success, while hunters on public lands will see greater numbers of hunters and comparatively lower success. Antler growth and body condition of bucks are good this year in many areas where animals had access to better forage. If hunters have access to private land, they may consider buying reduced price doe/fawn deer licenses since several thousand are available across the Region (many of which are restricted to private lands). Several deer hunt areas between Sheridan to Kaycee have been opened to doe/fawn rifle hunting beginning on September 1 to address crop damage issues. In Hunt Areas 27, 29, 30, or 33, a hunter can again purchase an unlimited number of doe/fawn deer licenses until the quota is exhausted. In Hunt Area 24, no quota (unlimited) was set for the type 8 white-tailed deer doe/fawn licenses.

NOTE: In mid-August 2013, reports of dead deer were received in Sheridan Region. It appears the deaths may be due to Epizootic Hemorrhagic Disease or blue-tongue. If the outbreak intensifies, white-tailed deer hunting may be affected by this disease.

### **GREEN RIVER REGION**

Hunters will likely experience better hunting for mule deer in 2013. Increased fawn production occurred in many Green River Region deer herds this summer, with the exception of Hunt Areas 131 and 100. Overall survival of deer was relatively good during the winter of 2012-13 and should result in a slight increase of deer numbers across the Region.

That said, many Green River Region hunting seasons have been restricted to a 4 to 14-day, antlered deer structure, with very limited opportunity to hunt does. Antler point restrictions remain in place in Hunt Areas 82, 100, and 132. Season lengths were determined using observed

buck-to-doe ratios and overall deer numbers. Areas with better buck and total deer numbers will have longer hunting seasons. Hunters will likely observe fewer 2 and 5+ year old males in the Uinta, Baggs, and southern Wyoming Range herds due to winter losses during the winters of 2007-08 and 2010-11. Buck ratios remain fair in these 3 herds, but are lower than ratios observed prior to 2007.

Mule deer numbers in the South Rock Springs herd (Hunt areas 101 and 102) appear similar to last year, and some large bucks were observed this summer. While the season in Hunt Area 102 will be open for any deer, hunters will be restricted to taking only antlered deer in Hunt Area 101. Hunters may expect to see good numbers of older-aged bucks in these areas.

## **LARAMIE REGION**

Hunters should expect to see improved deer hunting in Laramie Region compared to last year. Mule deer herds across the Region experienced good over-winter survival rates and late-summer precipitation should contribute to both good body condition and antler growth.

Hunters are encouraged to review the 2013 deer hunting regulations as season dates and limitations in the Laramie Region have changed substantially in some hunt areas. An antlered mule deer, 3-points or more on either antler limitation has been implemented in the Sheep Mountain (Hunt Areas 61 and 74-77) and Shirley Mountain herds (Hunt Area 70). Hunt areas in the Platte Valley herd (Hunt Areas 78-81, 83, and 161) are now limited quota deer areas. **Resident general licenses and nonresident Region D licenses are no longer valid in these Platte Valley hunt areas.**

If unseasonably warm temperatures persist during the first part of October, deer will be dispersed and hunters will have to hunt much harder in higher elevation areas or on timbered north-facing slopes. Good buck ratios in the Laramie Mountains and Goshen Rim herds should benefit deer hunters this fall, although access is always an issue in eastern portions of Laramie Region.

White-tailed deer hunting in southeast Wyoming should be good, especially for hunters with access to private lands. Deer hunters should also consider purchasing an antlerless elk license to take advantage of abundant elk in most of the Region's elk hunt areas. Hunters pursuing deer in the Snowy Range or Sierra Madre Mountains should be aware of the ongoing pine beetle epidemic that has resulted in the deaths of millions of lodgepole and ponderosa pines. Avoid dead trees when choosing a camp site. It is also a good idea to have access to a chainsaw.

## **LANDER REGION**

Similar to pronghorn, mule deer populations have continued to decline over the last couple of years due to poor fawn productivity. Of the 6 herds within Lander Region where we're able to estimate population size, all continue to be below objective following 2012 hunting seasons. Overall fawn ratios throughout the Region, with the exception of the Dubois and Sweetwater herds, were down in 2012. Buck-to-doe ratios remained relatively stable in most areas. As a result, hunters will experience shorter seasons, a reduced opportunity to harvest an antlerless deer, and antler point restrictions. Continued any white-tailed deer seasons are in place in the Lander, Riverton, and Jeffrey City areas to allow hunters additional opportunity.

## **CASPER REGION**

White-tailed Deer - Public lands on the Black Hills National Forest continue to provide reasonable hunting opportunity. However, following harsh conditions during the winter of 2010-11, subsequent mediocre fawn production, and losses from Epizootic Hemorrhagic Disease (EHD), white-tailed deer numbers are lower than during the early- to mid-2000's and hunters can expect to see reduced densities of white-tailed deer in the Black Hills this fall. Nonresident Region A licenses have been reduced since 2010 and declining resident hunter participation should result in lower hunter numbers on National Forest lands. Hunt Areas 1, 2, and 3 will close on November 22<sup>nd</sup> this year to reduce harvest of bucks.

Outside of the Black Hills, white-tailed deer are mainly found on private lands along creeks and rivers. While hunters can expect good hunting opportunity in these areas, they should plan to secure permission to access private land prior to purchasing a white-tailed deer license and going afield.

Mule Deer - Following several years of poor fawn productivity, the number of mature bucks available to hunters has declined across much of the Region, especially on public lands where hunting pressure is heavy. For the most part, already conservative seasons are unchanged for this fall. In 2013, the Department implemented a 3-point or better season in Hunt Area 66. The changes will likely result in decreased hunter numbers and reduce harvest of yearling bucks. Ultimately, this season should help to enhance yearling buck survival and result in improved mature buck availability in future years. Although buck numbers are currently at low levels, Hunt Area 66 continues to be popular among hunters because it provides a fair general license hunting experience. In addition, the 3-point or better season in Hunt Area 10 will continue this year. Hunters in the Black Hills and Cheyenne River areas will likely experience another year of tough mule deer hunting on both public and private lands. There are good quality bucks available, but their numbers are low. Doe/fawn licenses have been eliminated throughout much of the Region, and all remaining private-land licenses have sold out. To reduce hunting pressure, the non-resident quota was cut substantially in Region D. Deer hunting in limited quota Hunt Areas 34 and 89 west of Casper should continue to be good this year. Although these herds have declined to the same extent as herds that are hunted with general licenses, recent license quota reductions should ensure higher hunter success. Hunters should again expect to see some nice trophy bucks in these limited quota managed areas.

## **PINEDALE REGION**

The Sublette and Wyoming Range deer herds are 2 large populations with special management strategies designed to provide high quality hunting opportunities, older age-class deer, and high buck-to-doe ratios. Hunting conditions should be good this fall. Hunting seasons in all Regional hunt areas have been designed to increase overall deer numbers and reduce buck harvest below the 5 year average. To accomplish these goals, a standardized closing date (October 6<sup>th</sup>) for all general license hunting seasons in the Sublette herd unit was implemented in attempts to spread out hunting pressure. In addition, nonresident quotas for Region H will remain at 800 licenses.

In addition to mule deer hunting opportunities, an any white-tailed deer season will be offered again this year. White-tailed deer numbers appear to be stable or increasing along many of the major river corridors. Subsequently, a limited quota, type 3 license will be offered in Hunt Areas 138-140, 142, and 143 from October 1 to November 30. This type 3 license can be purchased in addition to a statewide general deer license.

**JACKSON REGION**

General license seasons will run from September 26 to October 31 in the Fall Creek elk herd. In the early- to mid-2000's, this elk herd experienced several years of sustained population growth. Recent hunting seasons have been successful in reducing elk numbers toward desired levels. The 2013 season will focus the general portion of the season on any elk with the exception that yearling males, or spike bulls, will be excluded from the harvest. This change in season structure should result in more bulls being added to the posthunt population. The 2013 hunting seasons will continue to focus harvest pressure on antlerless elk with reduced price cow or calf licenses valid into November in Hunt Area 84.

In the Afton herd, a significant change was implemented in 2008 in the lower Greys River which shortened the season in Hunt Area 89 in order to reduce harvest on bull elk. This strategy will continue in 2013 with general license hunting valid from October 15 to October 24. In Hunt Area 90, liberal seasons into November and increased limited quota cow or calf tags will again provide hunting opportunity while attempting to trim the segment of the herd that inhabits the Upper Greys River. Hunters should find trophy class bulls in Greys River hunt areas.

Conservative hunting seasons are proposed for Hunt Areas 70-71, 79, and 81-83 to address low recruitment while trying to maintain bull numbers. In the southern portion of the herd unit in Hunt Areas 75, 77, 78, and 80, cow seasons are proposed to address elk populations that summer along the Snake River corridor in southern Grand Teton National Park and subdivisions in Hunt Area 78. Hunter opportunities in Hunt Area 78 were improved in 2012 with the addition of an archery-only license for private lands. The River Bottoms portion of Hunt Area 75 is closed this year and Hunt Area 75 type 4 hunters will be allowed to hunt in Hunt Area 79 and a portion of Area 81 this fall in an effort to reduce hunter densities in southern portion of the Park. Hunters will continue to have opportunities to hunt on the National Elk Refuge (Refuge) and in Hunt Area 75 with reduced price cow/calf licenses. The Department's Hunter Management Access system will be used to allocate permits for the Refuge. Hunting season changes in the Moran Junction area are proposed to reduce hunting pressure on Teton Wilderness and Yellowstone elk with Hunt Areas 70, 71, and 79 closing on November 3. To address low calf-to-cow ratios and low recruitment in the Gros Ventre area (Hunt Areas 81-83), the shortened season length and antlered-only spikes-excluded limitation will be maintained in 2013.

**CODY REGION**

There should be great opportunity to hunt bull elk in the Bighorn Mountains this fall since there are many good quality bulls on National Forest. Unfortunately, hunters will have to work hard to find them because they are difficult to locate during the rush of hunting seasons. Deer and elk hunting both open October 15 and crowding can be an issue for many hunters. Due to a need for population control, crop damage, disease testing (brucellosis and chronic wasting disease) and other management challenges, some hunting seasons for antlerless elk will begin before the October 15 bull season. Once disturbed, big bulls head for the thickest timber, the steepest canyons, or the most undisturbed block of private land. Hunters will need patience, perseverance, and a lot of luck to bag their trophy bull.

During the 2012 hunting season, blood tubes were issued to elk hunters in the Bighorn Mountains as part of routine surveillance for brucellosis. Two of those blood samples returned positive test results indicating elk had, at a minimum, been exposed to brucellosis bacteria at some time in their lives. Those blood tests do not indicate that the animal had brucellosis and as a result of those 2 positives, more testing will occur in fall 2013. All elk hunters will be issued a blood sampling kit and asked fill the blood tube as soon as possible after getting their elk. All Game and Fish personnel will have additional blood kits to distribute as necessary. There will be check stations and remote coolers placed at strategic locations where blood samples can be dropped off. Game and Fish personnel will also be collecting lymph nodes from freshly killed elk to test for chronic wasting disease as well.

Elk numbers remain high on western slopes of the Bighorn Mountains. With hunting seasons for antlerless elk often lasting 3 to 4 months, there should be time to find your cow or calf. The hunting season for antlerless elk in Hunt Area 41 has 2 closed periods this year to let elk settle down from hunting pressure and go back out to more accessible areas. Consult hunting regulations for open/closed periods and other special limitations on your hunting license.

Both the South Bighorn (Hunt Areas 47-49) and Gooseberry elk herds (Hunt Areas 62-64) have plenty of elk, with a lots of reduced price cow/calf licenses available in all hunt areas. Access in some portions of these hunt areas can be difficult. However, Hunter Management Areas are available in Hunt Areas 47, 62, 63, and 64, which provide additional hunting opportunity on private lands. Overall, there is ample opportunity for elk hunting in the southern Bighorn Basin, along with very good bull quality in most areas.

In some areas near Cody, elk numbers exceed management objectives and antlerless elk hunting opportunities have been increased. However, in other areas decreased calf survival has reduced herd productivity and required reductions in both antlered and antlerless harvest. In fact, in Hunt Areas 50, 51, 52, and 53 general license antlered elk seasons were replaced with limited quota seasons in 2010 to reduce harvest of bull elk. In 2013, a like change was made from a general license antlered elk season to a limited quota season in Hunt Area 55. For similar reasons, the general license antlered elk rifle season in Hunt Area 60 was shortened by 10 days and will open on September 20 instead of September 10. With less productive elk herds in some areas (fewer calves produced), the opportunity to harvest bulls is less than in past years. Bull hunting in several hunt areas and on some license types will be “spikes excluded” in 2013, which restrict hunters to the harvest of mature bulls. A shorter general license antlered elk season outside of designated wilderness areas will be in place in 2013 for Hunt Areas 56 and 59, again to reduce harvest pressure on bull elk. Hunters are asked to consult elk regulations carefully to see specific changes. Elk numbers currently exceed management goals in Hunt Areas 54, 58, 59, 61, 65, and 121 and seasons are designed to increase harvest of antlerless elk. Areas near or below management goals include Hunt Areas 50, 51, 52, 53, 55, and 56. In these areas, seasons have been designed to maintain or reduce harvest of antlerless elk.

## **SHERIDAN REGION**

Sheridan Region contains some of Wyoming’s best known elk hunt areas. Those hunters successful in drawing 1 of the highly sought after limited quota any elk licenses for a hunt area in the Bighorn Mountains, the Rochelle Hills, or the Fortification area will have opportunity for a great hunt with the possibility of bringing home a real trophy. The limited quota any elk hunting season in Hunt Area 123 will be open this fall after not being opened since 2011. Because

potential hunters know there are some large bulls in this area, it was one of the hardest licenses to draw in the state. For those hunters not drawing a license, there are still some leftover antlerless elk licenses available and residents can purchase a general license to hunt in Areas 36 and 37. Success for general license hunters and limited quota antlerless elk license hunters tends to be much lower than those who have a limited quota any elk license, but they can still enjoy time together hunting with family and friends. In a small portion of Hunt Area 37, cow/calf hunting is scheduled to open September 1 and will run through September 30. This season is designed to allow rifles hunters the opportunity to harvest an elk before they leave public land and hopefully redistribute some elk. Antlerless elk (type 4 licenses) hunting in Hunt Area 38 will begin on October 1 this year, which should significantly increase hunter success.

NOTE: Elk hunters in hunt areas on the Bighorn Mountains are encouraged to collect blood samples from harvested elk in blood tubes provided as part of the brucellosis surveillance project. Department personnel will have spare blood tubes available and accept samples from successful hunters.

### **GREEN RIVER REGION**

Elk numbers remain high and continue to increase across the Region, with most populations above objective. Regional personnel expect another above average hunting season for elk hunters with increased licenses and longer seasons.

The Steamboat or “Desert” elk herd (Hunt Area 100) is estimated to be near, but slightly below objective and licenses were reduced for 2013. As per current special management direction, bull ratios remain high for this population. The average age of harvested bulls fell slightly over the last 2 years due to increased bull harvest, but numbers of older aged bulls remain in the herd. Antlered and antlerless hunting opportunity was reduced somewhat to maintain the population near objective. This area continues to be extremely popular with hunters, probably due to the abundance of mature bulls and limited time it requires to harvest an animal.

The West Green River herd (Hunt Areas 102-105) remains above objective. As a result, the number of antlerless elk licenses was increased to reduce the herd, while maintaining a shorter any elk season to maintain higher bull-to-cow ratios and older-aged males.

The Department significantly increased harvest in the South Rock Springs herd (Hunt Areas 30-32) in recent years due to growing numbers of elk. This interstate population is difficult to manage since elk move freely between Wyoming, Colorado, and Utah to escape hunting pressure and utilize existing seasonal habitats. The Department will be reduced opportunity in this area for 2013, but hunting will be very good for those that draw licenses. Bull ratios are high and many older-aged trophy class animals were harvested in 2012.

Hunting was liberalized across much of the Sierra Madre elk herd to address a population that has been significantly above objective for many years. Issues surrounding hunter density, access, road density, and perennially low bull ratios continue to impact the Department’s efforts to manage this population. Increased harvest of antlerless elk in Hunt Areas 13, 15, 21, and 108 will be achieved through a combination of general any elk, general antlerless, and reduced price cow-calf licenses.

Seasons in the Petition herd (Hunt Area 124) will be similar to last year, with greater bull hunting opportunity. We will continue to put the majority of harvest in this area on the female segment of the herd to limit population growth. This area is becoming a popular area with “trophy” bull hunters.

Elk hunting in the Uinta herd unit (Hunt Areas 106 and 107) continues to be affected by weather conditions more so than other elk populations in southern Wyoming. Elk in this herd move between Wyoming and Utah, creating challenges for sportsmen in Wyoming. Additionally, access is a concern in this herd, particularly in Hunt Area 106 where private lands are often leased to outfitters. The population is managed to maintain 600 wintering elk and minimize damage to stored grass hay, but in reality, weather conditions dictates the number of elk wintering in Wyoming more than hunting seasons.

### **LARAMIE REGION**

Several elk herds in Laramie Region are above their population objectives and should provide hunters with excellent hunting opportunities. Hunters should read regulations for their hunt area, as many seasons have changed from the 2012 season. In the Snowy Range herd, general license seasons in Hunt Areas 9 and 10 were changed to a 2-week antlerless elk limitation running from October 1<sup>st</sup> through October 14<sup>th</sup>. Beginning October 15<sup>th</sup> season limitations shift to antlerless elk only until the end of October. A spike-excluded limitation has been added to the general elk season for Hunt Areas 12 and 110. Hunters pursuing elk in the Snowy Range or Sierra Madre Mountains should be aware of the ongoing pine beetle epidemic that has resulted in deaths of millions of lodgepole and ponderosa pines, so avoid dead trees when choosing a camp site. Hunters are encouraged to bring a chainsaw when hunting and recreating in beetle-killed areas.

Areas burned by 2012 wildfires in Hunt Area 7 have started to recover and should provide for better hunting conditions. Elk have learned to avoid areas with high hunting pressure, but plenty of good elk hunting should be available away from well-traveled roads and trails. A few Public Land, Private Wildlife Hunter Management Areas provide access opportunities in the Region, but as with other species, access to private lands is limited in many areas. Hunters should plan ahead for places to hunt. Hunters interested in an additional reduced-price cow or calf license should consider Hunt Areas 5, 6, or 10. In some hunt areas, hunters may be able to purchase up to 3 elk licenses. The Department is working to secure access for antlerless elk hunters in Hunt Areas 5 and 6 where the elk population is above objective. More information will be available at a later date.

### **LANDER REGION**

Like much of Wyoming, elk populations are doing exceptionally well across Lander Region. Observed bull-to-cow ratios remain high over most of central Wyoming, while calf survival in 2012 was similar to previous years.

Favorable weather conditions during this fall’s hunting seasons should result in excellent harvest rates and hunter success in all hunt areas. With elk herds above objective in almost all locations, license levels and season dates have been designed to reduce populations toward management targets.

## **CASPER REGION**

High elk numbers continue to provide outstanding hunting opportunities throughout Casper Region. Nearly all elk areas in Casper Region opening dates and season lengths are nearly identical to 2012. Elk hunters should continue to enjoy remarkable numbers of elk and good hunting success, especially if the weather cooperates. Those hunters with general licenses should not plan to hunt in Converse, Niobrara, or Weston counties unless they have secured access to private lands known to contain elk. General license areas within these counties are not managed for a sustainable elk population. Thus, elk occur only in isolated areas on private lands in Hunt Areas 126 and 129. One noteworthy change for 2013 is the conversion of Hunt Area 116 from limited quota to a general license area. This change was made to better facilitate elk harvest on private lands since elk numbers remain well above desired levels. Since elk almost exclusively occupy private land in Hunt Area 116, general license hunters are encouraged to secure private land access before going afield.

## **PINEDALE REGION**

There are 4 elk herds managed in this Region. Liberal seasons have been in place for several years and are designed to drive populations down to objective levels while maintaining at least 20 bulls per 100 cows in post-hunt populations. A combination of mild temperatures and negligible moisture continue to hamper hunter success in Pinedale Region despite current hunting opportunities.

The Piney elk herd has exceeded population objective over the last several years. In an effort to reduce this herd, seasons in Hunt Areas 92 and 94 will open October 1<sup>st</sup> and October 15<sup>th</sup> for general license antlerless and any elk hunting, respectively, and extend to October 31<sup>st</sup>. The number of limited quota type 6 cow or calf licenses were maintained at 500 licenses and 550 licenses in Hunt Areas 92 and 94, respectively, and will run to November 24<sup>th</sup> to address surplus numbers of elk along the east slope of the Wyoming Range.

Elk numbers in the Pinedale herd increased over winter despite increased hunter success and improved overall harvest in 2012. This fall's hunting seasons will allow any elk to be taken by general license holders for both Hunt Areas 97 and 98 from October 1<sup>st</sup> to October 15<sup>th</sup> and then switch to antlerless elk from October 16<sup>th</sup> to November 15<sup>th</sup>. Reduced price limited quota type 6 licenses and season lengths were extended for both hunt areas in 2013, running from September 20<sup>th</sup> to November 15<sup>th</sup>.

The 2013 hunting season in the Hoback herd is similar to 2012 for both Hunt Areas 86 and 87. The herd is being managed to provide maximum recreational opportunities, but overall numbers of elk declined below management objectives the past 4 years. Conservative antlered only seasons will be in place for Hunt Area 87 north of Highway 189/191 to build elk numbers.

For the Upper Green River herd, 2013 hunting seasons will offer more antlerless elk hunting opportunities. This herd is above the management objective of 2500 animals and good numbers of reduced price limited quota type 6 licenses will be available for Hunt Areas 95 and 96. This herd is managed using a combination of general and limited quota licenses to meet management objectives.

# **MOOSE**

## **JACKSON REGION**

The Targhee moose herd has been designated for special management and conservative hunting seasons will be maintained in 2013 in the combined Hunt Areas 16 and 37. Poor hunter success in recent years and low calf-to-cow ratios are a concern in this herd unit. Hunting seasons in 2013 will offer 5 licenses for the combined Hunt Areas 16 and 37. The Jackson herd continues to be plagued with low calf:cow ratios, which has precluded any significant population growth and resulted in the elimination of antlerless tags for all hunt areas. License quotas in the Jackson Herd have decreased from a high of 495 in 1991 to 10 in 2013. In 2011, Hunt Areas 7, 14, 15 and 32 were closed because of low calf:cow ratios and declining population trends. Hunt Areas 17 and 28 were combined in 2012 and offer 5 antlered moose licenses in 2013. In the upper Gros Ventre drainage, Hunt Area 18 will remain at 5 antlered moose tags. Conservative seasons are again proposed to address low calf:cow ratios, poor recruitment and declining population trends. In the Jackson portion of the Sublette moose herd, management is focusing on stabilizing moose numbers in Hunt Areas 10, 20, 21, and 23. Mature bulls are consistently being harvested and the opportunity to harvest a trophy class Shiras moose has increased in recent years, especially in Areas 10 and 21. Throughout all of these hunt areas, the average antler spread continues to approach 40 inches. Because of the anticipated warm weather projected for this fall, hunters should plan on hunting when temperatures are the coolest and moose are likely to be feeding – at first light and early evening.

## **CODY REGION**

There were 5 hunting licenses issued for moose in Hunt Area 42 on the west side of the Bighorn Mountains. This moose population is small due to lack of large willow and aspen habitats on this side of the mountain. Hunters have suggested there are fewer big bulls available, but some nice trophies continue to be taken. Since most moose hunters concentrate in easily accessible areas (e.g., Porcupine Creek, Shell Creek, and Ten Sleep Creek), the oldest bulls now live in areas that are tougher to get to. If you were lucky enough to draw a Hunt Area 42 license, put on your hiking boots or saddle your horse and hunt away from highways and major forest roads for your greatest chance at a good bull. Moose numbers in the Absaroka Mountains remain at low densities. However, at current permit levels in Hunt Areas 9 and 11, hunters have been able to find and harvest mature bulls. We anticipate this fall's hunters will have good success with the likely possibility that several nice (+45 inch antler spread) bulls will be harvested.

## **SHERIDAN REGION**

The Bighorn Mountains in Sheridan Region have a thriving moose population. Limited quota licenses for any moose in Hunt Areas 1, 34, and 42/43 are some of the most highly sought after licenses in Wyoming. We expect there will be some large mature bulls harvested this fall as some real barn-burners have been observed during the summer of 2013. Although bull moose are often observed along roads and highways during summer, many bulls head for deep cover soon after the hunting season begins, making for a challenging hunt.

## **GREEN RIVER REGION**

Moose populations in the Uinta and Lincoln herd units remain down and this fall's season will remain conservative to reflect this. Disease (parasite) concerns have been documented and significant losses appear to have occurred, although recent losses are much lower than previous observed losses. As a result, antlerless moose licenses have been eliminated in the

Uinta and Lincoln moose herds. However, bull hunters will find ample opportunity to harvest very large, older-aged bulls, particularly in Hunt Area 26.

### **LARAMIE REGION**

Hunting should be excellent for those hunters lucky enough to draw a Hunt Area 38/41 moose license. This area in southeastern Wyoming is one of the premier moose areas in the nation. Moose are found scattered throughout the Medicine Bow National Forest and adjacent lands. Ample opportunity exists to harvest a trophy bull for hunters willing to venture away from roads. Good calf production in this herd often makes it difficult for antlerless moose hunters to locate a cow without a calf at her side. Hunters are encouraged to avoid highway corridors and popular tourist areas when pursuing their moose.

### **LANDER REGION**

Populations in both of the Lander Region's moose herds are below desired objective levels and continue to struggle, though in the Lander herd unit, moose numbers seem to be slightly increasing. Although moose calf survival remained near average in 2012, overall herd performance and population size continue to be concerns for Department personnel. Seasons for 2013 will be identical to those held in 2012. Hunt Area 30 license holders will continue to be allowed to hunt in Hunt Area 2 from November 1 through the 20<sup>th</sup>. Quotas remain the same in the Lander Region.

### **PINEDALE REGION**

Pinedale Region manages the majority of the Sublette moose herd unit which is designed to provide recreational opportunities and maintain high bull:cow ratios. The Sublette herd remains below the mid-winter trend count objective, but has seen slow, steady growth since 2005. Since 2003, a total of 385 permits were eliminated. This reduction in harvest has been successful in reversing a downward trend in this population. The 2013 seasons are targeted at maintaining quality bull ratios and an average age of 4 years old. Trophy class bulls continue to be harvested in this portion of the herd unit with the average antler spread approaching 40 inches. If encountered by sportsmen, warm daytime temperatures will likely result in many bulls being found in the cooler, heavily timbered slopes except at first light and dusk.

## **BIGHORN SHEEP**

### **JACKSON REGION**

Sheep hunting opportunities for the Targhee herd will again be offered in 2013 with two resident licenses available. From 2006 to 2011, one ram was harvested each year. However, no sheep were harvested in 2012.

For the Jackson Sheep herd, the 2013 hunting licenses were reduced from 12 to 8 in Hunt Area 7. The reductions come after managers detected pneumonia-related mortalities across all age classes during 2012 and early-2013. Despite the detection of pneumonia in this population, the average age of harvested rams was 6.5 years old in 2012. While it is still unclear what impacts the current disease outbreak may have on this herd, sheep population trends indicate that ram numbers were high during late-spring 2013 and hunters should experience a good hunt this fall.

### **CODY REGION**

Conditions during the winter of 2010-11 significantly impacted sheep in Hunt Area 4, as these sheep reside year-round on high elevation ranges. As a result, permit levels were reduced to maintain ram quality. A current area closure due to the Hardluck Fire in the South Fork of the Shoshone River has affected access to a large portion of Hunt Area 4 and a very small portion of Hunt Area 5. As a result Hunt Area 4 sheep hunters were given the opportunity to “carry-over” their license to 2014. Population surveys and 2012 ram harvest information from Hunt Areas 1-3 indicate 2013 sheep hunters should experience good success on mature rams.

The winter of 2010-11 was severe enough in Hunt Area 5 to cause some winter mortality. As a result, approximately 140 ram heads have been found in Hunt Area 5 since January 2011. Although this is significant, hunter success, harvest, and ram quality continues to remain high and this herd still has a lot of sheep to hunt. We predict the 2013 season will again have good hunting, but hunters will have to put a little more effort into their hunt, especially if you are looking for an older age-class ram.

The number of bighorn sheep observed in Hunt Area 12 has been holding steady the past few years and Game and Fish personnel counted 141 bighorns during a survey in late July 2013. In 2011, 147 sheep were documented. The number of rams counted has also remained about the same during the past 3 years. Only 2 hunting licenses are issued for this area to allow some opportunity without having a major impact on ram numbers. Private lands can restrict access to this area, so please contact Game and Fish personnel for advice and landowner contact information.

### **LARAMIE REGION**

Bighorn sheep hunting in the Laramie Peak area was very good last fall and should be again this year. Ram ratios in Hunt Area 19 are very good and lamb production has increased during the last 3 years. The future looks bright for this herd and hunters can expect to have a good opportunity to find a trophy ram this fall. Bighorn sheep Hunt Areas 18 and 21 are closed for the 2013 season.

### **LANDER REGION**

Lamb production improved somewhat in the Whiskey Mountain bighorn sheep population in 2012, though disease issues continue to be a concern. Lamb productivity has been depressed in the herd unit for nearly 20 years and while it has certainly impacted population growth, there are still plenty of rams for harvest. So, hunter success in 2013 shouldn't be impacted.

Hunt Area 22 (Dubois Badlands) will once again be open for hunting any ram in 2012. Four licenses will be valid to hunt in Hunt Area 22 from September 1-30. After September 30, these licenses will also be valid in Hunt Area 5.

### **PINEDALE REGION**

There is one sheep herd (Darby Mountain) plus a portion of the Whiskey Mountain Herd managed by the Pinedale Region.

The 2013 bighorn sheep hunting season for Hunt Area 24 is closed due to the lack of mature rams, low lamb numbers, and poor recruitment of sheep from juvenile to older-age classes. In 1998, this hunt area was also closed to hunting when total sheep numbers and availability of mature rams declined below acceptable levels.

There are no proposed changes for the Whiskey Mountain Hunt Areas 8 and 23 and licenses will remain at 12.

## **MOUNTAIN GOATS**

### **JACKSON REGION**

The Palisades goat herd (Hunt Area 2) is an extension of Idaho's Palisades mountain goat population that has expanded into Wyoming. This interstate goat population continues to migrate across state lines during annual movements to summer and winter ranges. A hunting season was initiated in 1999 with 4 licenses. In 2005, licenses were increased to 8, with the season running from September 1 to October 31. The same season structure was instituted for 2013.

An August 2012 aerial survey located greater than 100 goats on Wyoming summer ranges. Trophy class billies continue to be taken in this herd. During the 2010 hunting season, several record book goats were taken and there were several trophy class billies noted during 2012 survey efforts. Reproductive rates over the last few years indicate this population is productive and continues to remain well above management objectives. Hunters should expect to find goats in steep, rocky terrain with trips of up to 5 miles away from roads.

### **CODY REGION**

Mountain goats in Hunt Area 1 are doing well. Hunter success is generally 90 to 100%. Hunt Area 3 was added to increase hunting opportunity in hard to access backcountry with low densities of goats, and this year a few more licenses were added in both Hunt Areas 1 and 3 to increase opportunity. The 2013 season should again see high success rates in the Beartooth goat herd.

## **UPLAND GAME BIRDS - SMALL GAME**

### **JACKSON REGION**

Expect good hunting for ruffed and blue grouse in the Salt River, Wyoming, Teton, and Snake River Mountains. The mild spring seems to have resulted in good production for both species. In the past 3 years, cold, wet spring conditions resulted in poor initial nesting success, but a strong reneating effort by ruffed grouse produced some large broods. Good berry crops in many areas should attract grouse broods.

Sage-grouse hunting season is closed in the Snake River drainage in the Jackson Region and that portion of the Pinedale Region in Hoback Basin.

There is a healthy population of snowshoe hares within the Region, however, several areas of the Bridger-Teton National Forest are closed to winter access beginning either December 1 or December 15. Hunters should check with the Bridger-Teton National Forest for details of their winter travel plan.

### **CODY REGION**

In southern portions of the Bighorn Basin, chukar numbers are spotty, but overall hunting should be better than the previous 3 years. Brood surveys conducted this summer revealed multiple broods with good numbers of chicks per brood. Hungarian partridge should provide fair to good hunting throughout southern portions of the Bighorn Basin, while pheasant hunting will be only fair.

In northern portions of the Bighorn Basin, weather during the hatching period last spring was warm and wet, which should mean good things for upland bird hunters this fall. Cold weather has been shown to decrease survival of newly hatched chicks. Research studies in the Bighorn Basin documented good nest hatch success for marked sage-grouse hens in 2013. Similar success may have also occurred for other upland species. Dry conditions after hatch, however, may have decreased survival of chicks due to impacts on vegetation and insects that young birds rely on. Game birds closely tied to irrigated agricultures (pheasants and wild turkeys) should fare well. Those upland species using habitats away from agriculture areas may not have survived as well during the dry summer.

### **SHERIDAN REGION**

Game bird hunters in Sheridan Region may not have as good hunting this fall as they did in 2012. The drought of 2012 resulted in little residual cover for nesting habitat in spring 2013. Field personnel report small broods or baren hens across the Region. Spring “lek” (breeding ground) surveys of sage-grouse showed that sage-grouse numbers were still below long-term averages. Wild turkey numbers vary throughout the region. In the Buffalo and Sheridan areas there were already large numbers of turkeys, so it is expected there will be plenty of birds. Pheasants from the Wyoming Game and Fish Department bird farm will be released on several Sheridan Region Walk-In Areas. Hunters are reminded that most game bird hunting occurs on private land, except for blue grouse hunting on the Bighorn Mountains and pheasant hunting on the Department’s Walk-In Areas.

### **GREEN RIVER REGION**

Sage-grouse hunting in Green River Region should be good, although observed brood size varies locally with precipitation. Wetter, higher habitats are producing much larger observed broods this year. Observed chicks per hen ratios are very high this year in all habitats receiving adequate moisture and hunting will be better year than the previous 2 years. Mountain grouse (ruffed grouse and blue grouse) will vary by locality, although some pockets of good hunting should occur. Both blue grouse and ruffed grouse hunting should be good in the Wyoming Range, and blue grouse hunting will likely be good in the Sierra Madre Mountains.

Cottontail rabbits appear to be on the increase throughout much of the Region, which will yield some good hunting opportunities. Snowshoe hares, a species that receives very little harvest pressure in the Green River Region, are numerous in some of the higher elevations of the southern Wyoming Range, Uinta, and Sierra Madre Mountains, providing additional hunting opportunity.

### **LARAMIE REGION**

Spring moisture and heavy rains throughout July have helped improve nesting and brood-rearing cover for sharp-tailed grouse and pheasants. Good pheasant production at the Downar Bird Farm will provide hunters the opportunity to hunt pheasants on designated walk-in areas throughout Goshen, Laramie and Platte Counties, and the Springer and Glendo special permit hunts.

Turkeys should be plentiful for fall and spring hunters based on above average poult production. Cottontail rabbits and snowshoe hares are abundant throughout the Laramie Region. Blue grouse hunting should be similar to last year for the Snowy Range and Sierra Madre Mountains.

## **LANDER REGION**

The Lander Region will hold its ninth hunting season for wild turkeys in fall 2013. In January 1988, Department personnel trapped 41 wild turkeys on the 3T Ranch in Johnson County, Wyoming. These birds were subsequently released along the Wind River south of Boysen Reservoir in Fremont County. Since their release about 20 years ago, turkeys along the Wind River have moved between private lands and lands managed by the Bureau of Reclamation. Currently, Department personnel believe there are enough birds to support a limited hunting season. Due to major access constraints across the WRIR, however, it will be extremely difficult for the general public to hunt these turkeys.

Seasons for other upland game birds will be similar to previous years. Overall, grouse (sage-, blue, and ruffed) numbers remained stable during 2013. But, with severe drought conditions during summer 2012 it appears sage-grouse brood production was down as expected.

The 8:00 A.M. to 4:00 P.M. shooting hours at Sand Mesa and Ocean Lake Wildlife Habitat Management Areas, and the 1-day youth hunt at Sand Mesa proved to be very popular with pheasant hunters and will be continued in 2013. This year's youth hunt will occur on Saturday, November 16. Bird farm pheasants will again be released at the Sand Mesa and Ocean Lake Habitat Units through November

Cottontails, snowshoe hares, and red squirrels appear to down this year within the Lander Region. For those interested in pursuing these animals, hunting conditions should be fair to good in 2013.

## **CASPER REGION**

Based on lek counts, sage-grouse numbers continue to decline precipitously in the Casper Region following 7 straight years of very poor chick production/survival. Recent poor chick production and survival is attributed to less than ideal weather conditions. Multiple years of cool, wet spring conditions following the peak of hatching can cause significant chick mortality during the early brood rearing phase. Subsequent extreme drought in recent years has also reduced nesting cover. As sage-grouse numbers have declined, the Department has responded with increasingly conservative seasons. Thus, grouse numbers should remain high enough to ensure those hunters that do pursue sage-grouse will not have much trouble filling their daily bag limits, especially south and west of Casper. Extremely conservative season limitations will remain in effect in northeast Wyoming with a 3-day season and a daily bag/possession limit of 2/4 birds, respectively. Many other portions of the Casper Region with marginal sage-grouse populations remain closed to hunting.

Following a period of decline, blue grouse numbers in the Casper Region appear to be rebounding with anecdotal reports indicating chick production and survival improved over the past 3 years. As a result, blue grouse densities should be improved, but will continue to remain below those of the good years.

Chukar and Hungarian partridge levels in the Casper Region continue to rebound, although these species were set back in 2012 due to the extreme drought. Some reports of large broods have been received thus far in 2013, and Department personnel predict hunters should find more partridge this year in the Casper area. However, even in good years, hunters in the Casper Region should not expect to see chukars and partridge in densities that occur in the Bighorn Basin and areas around Buffalo and Sheridan where better partridge habitats can be found.

Due to substantial losses during the 2010-2011 winter followed by subsequent poor poult production and survival, wild turkey numbers in the Black Hills remain low for this fall and the upcoming spring of 2014. Local managers conduct intensive brood count surveys in the Black Hills at the end of August each year, so it is too early to know if poult production has improved in 2013 as of this report. However, biologists feel climatic conditions were not ideal for good poult production this spring and summer. While hunting opportunities remain fair in the Black Hills, overall wild turkey numbers are considerably lower than they were during much of the preceding decade. Wild turkeys continue to thrive in much of the Casper Region outside of the Black Hills. As a result, fall wild turkey hunting on a general license should be favorable throughout the remainder of the Casper Region as access to hunt them on private lands remains good. In general, poult production has been poor to moderate outside of the Black Hills in recent years, resulting in relatively stable wild turkey numbers throughout most of the Region. However, poult production was excellent in 2012 in the Casper and Glenrock areas, which has significantly bolstered local wild turkey numbers.

#### **PINEDALE REGION**

The 2013 upland game bird seasons for this Region are similar to last year. Sage-grouse seasons will run in late-September to shift the hunt later in the fall and reduce vulnerability of hens with broods.

Blue and ruffed grouse seasons are the same as in past years. Ruffed and blue grouse production has been variable throughout the Region. The mild 2013 spring seems to have resulted in good production for both species.

## **MIGRATORY GAME BIRDS**

#### **CENTRAL FLYWAY OVERVIEW**

Drier conditions during spring and summer of 2012 caused a decline in habitat conditions for migratory game birds across most of central and eastern Wyoming compared to the prior two years. Although spring and summer precipitation improved in 2013, much of the state remains under a hydrologic drought. The overall impact of the wet and cold weather on migratory game bird production during May and June is unknown in Wyoming. Hunting success for all migratory game birds will depend on the chronology of bird migration and weather patterns between now and the end of the various hunting seasons. The reduction in surface water will likely reduce the state's ability to attract and hold migrating birds and may decrease hunting opportunities to some degree. However, migrating birds will also concentrate around the remaining bodies of water.

#### **PACIFIC FLYWAY OVERVIEW**

During 2012 and continuing in 2013, wetland conditions and breeding habitat deteriorated from the good conditions observed during the 2011 summer. Breeding duck surveys are not currently conducted in Wyoming but brood production is expected to decline except on managed wetlands. As a result, hunting success for migratory game birds, particularly locally-raised birds, may be somewhat lower. However, early season hunting should be good where birds concentrate near available water and irrigated farmlands. The liberal hunting season framework will be in effect in both the Central and Pacific flyway portions of Wyoming based on the continental status of duck populations. Fall and early winter weather patterns often determine hunting success for Wyoming hunters, either pushing birds south into and through Wyoming or allowing many birds to stage in eastern Montana. In a mild fall, many mallards and Canada geese in the Central Flyway will shortstop farther north in the open water areas of the Yellowstone and Missouri Rivers. The Pacific Flyway in Wyoming is not on a major migration corridor and hunting opportunity is primarily dependent on local production and some movement of birds out of southwest Montana and Yellowstone National Park.

## **DUCKS**

The number of ducks counted in the traditional breeding survey area of Canada and north-central US this year was 45.6 million. This was a 6% decrease from last year, but 33% higher than the long-term average. Many of the ducks we hunt in the Central Flyway portion of Wyoming are raised in Alberta where the number of ponds counted in May increased 40% compared to the prior year's count. The number of ponds in Montana and the Western Dakotas decreased 11% in addition to the 56% decrease last year. The breeding duck estimate decreased 8% in southern Alberta, but declined 35 % in Montana and the Western Dakotas. The outlook for the duck migration into Wyoming looks good based on a projected fall-flight index of 13.0 million mallards. However, diminished wetland conditions in eastern Wyoming will reduce our ability to attract and hold ducks. As always, hunting success in Wyoming will be highly influenced by surface water conditions, availability of waste grain, and weather patterns along the migration corridor.

## **DARK GEESE**

Canada geese from three populations are found in Wyoming. Canada geese from the Rocky Mountain Population (RMP) occupy Wyoming west of the Continental Divide and are also found in western portions of the Central Flyway including the Big Horn Basin, Wind River Basin and western Carbon and Natrona counties. Although there is some mixing of these populations, large Canada geese east of the RMP are mostly from the Hi-line Population (HLP) and smaller Arctic-nesting Central Flyway Canada Goose Population (ANCFP). The spring population index for RMP geese increased 11%, however the fall flight is expected to be average. In 2013, spring population surveys of HLP geese estimated the population at 338,900 geese, 31% lower than last year's estimate. The 2013 fall flight of HLP geese is will likely be average. Production of ANCFP geese in 2013 is expected to be above average resulting in a fall flight likely higher than in 2012. Hunting success for both upland and migratory game birds increases in years with good brood production. Hunting success in Wyoming will be heavily influenced by surface water conditions, availability of waste grain, and weather patterns along the migration corridor.

## **LIGHT GEESE**

Most of the light geese that migrate through Wyoming are from the Western Central Flyway Population (WCFP). Historically, this population was comprised predominately of lesser snow geese, but Ross's geese now represent nearly a third of the population. During the 2013 wintering ground surveys, 225,900 geese were counted, reflecting a 10% increase from the number counted in 2012. WCFP snow goose production in 2013 is expected to be above average. Snow and Ross' geese typically bypass Wyoming during the fall migration, with only small groups sporadically encountered. The majority of the hunting takes place during the spring Conservation Order, when up to 100,000 light geese stage in southeast Wyoming. Hunting success will increase with a higher proportion of inexperienced juvenile birds in the fall flight. Hunting success will also be heavily influenced by surface water conditions, availability of waste grain, and weather patterns along the migration corridor.

## **SNIFE**

Based on data from the North American breeding bird survey, snipe populations slightly decreased in Wyoming from 1966-2011, and slightly increased throughout the United States and Canada over the same period. However, the impact of the drought could reduce snipe hunting opportunities in shallow wetland and riparian areas.

## **RAILS**

Based on the most recent data from the North American breeding bird survey, Virginia rail populations have decreased slightly in Wyoming and increased in the United States and Canada, from 1966-2011. During the same period, sora rails increased in Wyoming, the United States, and Canada. Soras are the most abundant and widely distributed of the North American rails. The drought's impact on surface water could reduce rail hunting opportunities.

## **MOURNING DOVES**

Based on the Call-Count Survey, the number of mourning doves heard in Wyoming has declined over the 1966-2013 period and also during recent years (e.g., the 2004-2013 period). Changing land use practices along the traditional call count routes are believed largely responsible for the apparent decline. Although the call count of breeding mourning doves declined, hunting success

will likely be comparable to that of previous years. The drought's impact on surface water and seed production could affect hunting opportunities in some areas. Locally-raised doves usually migrate out of the state with the first significant cold snap, which can happen anytime from late August through mid-September.

### **SANDHILL CRANES**

The cranes that occur in Crane Hunt Area 7 (eastern Wyoming) are primarily from the Mid-Continent Population (MCP) of sandhill cranes. Annual indices to abundance of the MCP sandhill cranes have been relatively stable since the early 1980s and above the established population objective of 349,000 – 472,000. The spring 2013 index, in the Central Platte River Valley of Nebraska, was the largest number of sandhill cranes ever counted likely due to deep snow and ice in the Dakotas. The majority of this population overfly Wyoming during migration. Locating MCP sandhill cranes on the ground is the key to hunting success.

The cranes that occur in Hunt Areas 1-6 in central and western Wyoming are from the Rocky Mountain Population (RMP). The fall 2012 pre-migration survey for the RMP resulted in a count of 15,417 cranes and a 3-year average of 17,992 sandhill cranes, which is within the established population objective of 17,000 – 21,000. It is too early to gauge sandhill crane production in western Wyoming. The dry, cold spring may not have been conducive to good survival of juveniles, which is always relatively low for this species. Cranes will begin concentrating on fall staging areas in mid to late August. The RMP crane population has been increasing in recent years but poor production in 2011 and 2012 contributed to a drop in the 2012 fall crane survey count. As a result, the harvest allocation decreased for all participating states, including Wyoming. In 2013, 90 fewer permits will be available to Wyoming hunters. We anticipate about 90 cranes will be harvested in Wyoming in 2013 compared to 134 in 2012.

Cranes in Areas 4 and 6 roost and feed in the same general locations every year. Roost locations in Hunt Area 6 are north of Worland, the Otto area, Powell to Ralston, and Ralston Reservoir. Roost locations in Hunt Area 4 are Hidden Valley, Riverview Valley, and the south side of Ocean Lake. For best success, scout the birds prior to the season and obtain permission to access the fields they are using.